

Being a social worker working with abused, neglected, children with emotional and behavioral needs, as well as being a former foster parent, and adoptive parent, I ask you to please consider acting on this bill's behalf. So many children in foster care need to have someone looking out for their educational needs. Sometimes social workers do not have the same training as a surrogate parent when it comes to advocating for children/youths' educational needs. The surrogate would have specialized training in educational services and laws.

When a child is in foster care, group home, residential treatment facility, correctional facility, the child who does not have an approved plan of individualized educational plan does not have an educational surrogate parent advocating for their needs. An educational surrogate is only assigned for children with a specialized education plan. The educational surrogate is only for educational purposes. They receive specialized training in education and educational rights. This bill would assign an educational surrogate for children not living with their parent regardless of whether they meet the criteria of special education or not as long as the child is in DCF's care. The surrogate would be able to contribute a lot if they are able to have both an understanding of education and trauma of children/youths in placement. Children who are in out of home care often have experienced trauma which impacts their education. The child needs to have an advocate who understands the child's educational needs, as well as an understanding of educational rights and services which would be available to the child/youth. The surrogate parent's only role would be the child's education. They have no caretaking role physically. The surrogate parent would ensure the child's education does not fall through the cracks of multiple systems the child may be caught up in. The surrogate has no say in the legal decisions of why a child is in out of home care. However the individual could help the birth parent or physical caretaker to make sure the child's needs are met. There are times there is no educational advocate for the child who has experienced trauma. The child does not have an IEP. However the child's education continues to be affected by the trauma he/she has experienced. The trauma can set the child behind academically. If there are no educational services available for the child (youth) the child could be at risk of dropping out of school because the student feels so far behind the peers in the classroom.

I ask you approve this bill and help it become the law of the land. It will save money in the long run as the child who is affected by trauma may drop out of school or become involved in negative behaviors in society. Rather than the student's path ahead leading to prison, the child's educational needs would be able to be met. This student may become a person who can contribute a lot of positive things to society. Please help prevent any child from dropping out of school. Approval of this bill would be a good step in the right direction.

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